PRESS RELEASE

Ombudsman probes Transport Department's requirements for physical fitness certification of driving licence applicants/holders

The Ombudsman, Ms Winnie Chiu, today (29 June) announced the launch of a direct investigation to examine the requirements of the Transport Department (TD) for the physical fitness certification of driving licence applicants/holders.

With an ageing population in Hong Kong, there will be a steady increase in the proportion of driving licence holders who are elderly. As a person's eyesight, physical strength, reactions and even cognitive abilities are likely to diminish with age, these changes may have an impact on the capability to drive motor vehicles.

In Hong Kong, pursuant to the Road Traffic (Driving Licences) Regulations, all persons applying for or renewing a driving licence must declare to the TD as to whether or not they are suffering from any disease or physical disability specified in its First Schedule (such as epilepsy, mental disorder or hypertension), or any other disease or physical disability which would be liable to cause the driving by them of a motor vehicle to be a source of danger to the public. While a driving licence is normally valid for 10 years, the licence held by a person aged above 60 but below 70 is valid up to the day before the holder reaches 70 or for a period of three years from the date of issue of the licence, whichever is the longer, and the one held by a person aged 70 or above is valid for a maximum of three years. Moreover, an applicant aged 70 or above is required to produce a Medical Examination Certificate completed and signed by a registered medical practitioner to confirm that the applicant is medically fit to drive. The above requirements are applicable to applications for the driving licences of all vehicle classes, including private cars, light goods vehicles and commercial vehicles (Note). Preliminary inquiry by the Office of The Ombudsman revealed that the TD has suggested the scope of medical checks for applicants over the age of 70 to be performed by medical practitioners for completing the Medical Examination Certificate. However, medical practitioners are not required to conduct any specified medical examinations for the applicants before completing the certificate.

In fact, many overseas countries/regions have introduced measures requiring senior drivers to undergo various health checks, thereby ascertaining their physical fitness to drive. Meanwhile, as heavy commercial vehicles are bulkier, heavier or carrying more passengers in comparison to private cars, and are generally driven on

roads for longer periods of time, the risks of these vehicles being involved in traffic accidents are higher. Consequently, some countries/regions have implemented more stringent requirements for medical examination of drivers of heavy commercial vehicles to enhance the safety of road users.

Ms Chiu said, “As the population of Hong Kong continues to age, an essential part of the Government’s promotion of road safety is to ensure that all motorists are physically fit to drive. A proper mechanism for physical fitness certification is particularly crucial. In this connection, I have decided to initiate a direct investigation to examine whether the TD has prescribed appropriate requirements for the physical fitness certification of driving licence applicants/holders, with a view to making improvement recommendations where necessary.”

The Ombudsman is inviting views from members of the public on this topic. Written submissions should reach the Office of The Ombudsman by 29 July 2021:

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Note: Commercial vehicles include private and public light buses, taxis, private and public buses, franchised public buses, medium and heavy goods vehicles, articulated vehicles and special purpose vehicles.

Office of The Ombudsman
29 June 2021

For media enquiries, please contact the External Relations Section at enquiry@ombudsman.hk